

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Little Letters: Jude
Palm Sunday: What would you die for?
Pastor Dave Scherrer - April 17, 2011

The Little Letters

We conclude our series on the little letters today. It has been a hard series for me, there is so much to speak about but we purposely kept this a survey of the little letters rather than a full exegetical study – a verse by verse study. In the 8 weeks we have looked at 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, James, The letters of Peter, and last week the epistles (or letters) of John. And today we wrap it up with the little letter of Jude. And Jude is a great letter, short and sweet and it is mostly about the pursuit of truth. I think it will be a great day. But it is a great day for another reason too.

Today is Palm Sunday, a very special day in the lives of Christians. It is one of the few times when Jesus got the recognition he deserved, bitter sweet as it was. Jesus is entering the city of Jerusalem, He knows that it is for the last time in His human body. He sent His disciples into the city to find a donkey colt to ride on and then as word gets out that Jesus is about to enter the crowds gather. After all, Jesus is the one who raised Lazarus from the dead only a few days before in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem. The word has spread like wildfire. And now he was approaching the city. This was the one who has healed someone blind from birth, walked on water, turned water into wine and fed thousands from nothing. This was the one who taught of such strange things like “loving those who persecute you and blessing those who hate you.” Here was the one who claimed to be God Son, equal with the Father. Of course the crowds gathered!

This historic event in Jesus’ life has inspired much artwork, poetry and passion. Like this piece by Pietro Lorenzetti, a fresco now in the Basilica de San Franscesco d’Assisi from the early 14th century.



I love this account, it reads like the prologue to a murder mystery. Wait I guess it is! Let's start at verse 12 of chapter 12 in John's account of Jesus' life:

John 12:12-19

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

¹⁴And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

¹⁵"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

In Mid-Eastern tradition the donkey is an animal of peace, versus the horse, which is the animal of war. Therefore, a king came riding upon a horse when he was bent on war and rode upon a donkey when he wanted to point out that he was coming in peace. Therefore Jesus' entry to Jerusalem symbolized his entry as the Prince of Peace, not as a war waging king. They call it **Palm Sunday** because the children waved palm branches, the traditional welcoming of a King coming home from victorious from battle. It is quite a scene.

I love this little side bar that the account of the triumphant entry has in Mark's version:

Mark 11:11

And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

What do you suppose he was thinking about? This little phrase adds to the drama don't you think? - One last look before the final week of his life. One last look as the sun sets over the city He loves most. Maybe a skyline of the temple with hints of red and purple in the sky. The City of David - the city of his forthcoming passion. In only four days he would be betrayed at midnight, flogged nearly to death, beaten senseless, mocked by the Romans with a crown of thorns as a so called King. He was driven by a mob at night from one religious or political jackal to another in false trials. Finally the next morning hanged on a cross to die crucified. Just four days after this triumphant palm Sunday. That is why I said this triumphant entry must have felt bitter sweet. Why would he do it? What constrained him from whispering one little word "Enough" – and leveling his tormentors into ash? What was it that kept Jesus on the cross?

Now I want to step back from this scene for a moment and talk about something else very important to me: Truth and Love.

Love and Truth: The church's one true 'corner on the market'

I believe that the church of the 21st century is at risk. Our truest commodity that is different than anything offered by the world is love and truth, and our love and truth have become compromised, conditional and far too 'world like.' Jesus defined love by his life – a life of sacrifice. He sacrificed pleasure for purpose, fame for his friends, he sacrificed power for servant hood. He defined love by his life. And the church is failing to love like Christ all too often. The church used to be the leader in loving the sick and poor and marginalized. Now too often we let the government do the heavy lifting.

And then there is truth. I believe that it was also Truth held Jesus to the cross. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." The truth was, unless He died there would be no way to life. It was this truth as well as love that held Him on the cross.

Truth is a fragile gift. You see we live in a world of lies. The prince of the power of the air rules here. He is a liar and the father of lies. Most everything you see on TV, read in the paper, watch at the movies, even hear from your neighbors is not the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is partial truth and that makes it a lie.

The writers of the little letters were terribly concerned about the lies creeping into the church.

2 Timothy 3:1-7, 4:2-5

¹But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ²For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶For among them are

those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷always learning and never able to arrive at knowledge of the truth.

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Jude 3-4

³Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

You see in the time of Jude there was a growing threat called Gnosticism. It was their assertion that God was unknowable and far too pure and perfect to have anything to do with the material universe which was considered evil. Since this world was evil, in the mind of the Gnostics, it was possible to pursue pleasures of all kinds and still be spiritual. Sexual immoralities, drunkenness, pursuit of riches for the pleasure they can bring, all open for pursuit. Jude said this is not true but a lie.

The apostles Paul and John both confronted a theological lie of a similar form. The theologians call it antinomianism. Today we might call it cheap grace. It is the idea that since God is forgiving, we can go on sinning and trust his grace and love to forgive us. To that Paul says, ***“May it never be”*** (Romans 6:1-2) and John says ***“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.”*** (1 John 3:9-10). John is not saying that we don’t ever sin, what he is saying is that in the heart of the true believer is new and does not desire sin and seeks to let God free us from sin’s power. While we may sin we don’t want to.

Jesus Himself told the disciples on perhaps Wednesday of this same passion week (Matthew 26:2) to watch out for false teachers:

Matthew 24:9-13

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. ¹⁰And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹²And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

There are some famous so called Christian Cults. They are known for referring to Jesus but they re-define Him according to their false teaching:

- **Jehovah Witness** teach that Jesus is the archangel Michael--a created being. Jesus is just an agent of God, nothing more.
- **Mormans** teach that Jesus is the first born of a new race of Adams, He is only our elder brother and one day we will be like Him in every respect physically, in intellect, attributes or powers Jesus was not begotten by the Holy Spirit but believe that God had relations with Mary. According to Latter Day Saint theology, Jesus is no more divine than any of us can strive to be.
- **Church of Christ Scientist** teach that Jesus is not God, but that He was the highest human concept of the perfect man, and not to be worshipped. Jesus never died as

sickness, sin and death do not exist. He just thought He was dead. Therefore the blood of Jesus has no atoning value and since sin is an illusion we are not guilty.

These beliefs about Jesus seem incredible to you perhaps, but I would guess that many of you have experienced these traditions and know some very faithful believers of these traditions.

Let me focus in a bit now though. Jude isn't so worried about false teachers – liars- outside the church. He is concerned about false teachers entering into the church. Teaching that takes one doctrine or emphasis of Scripture and adds that to the sufficient non-negotiables of the Bible. For instance:

Prosperity or Health and Wealth Gospel

Liberation theology is another good example. A mid 20th century movement, Liberation Theology asks whose side should God be on - the side of the oppressed or the side of the oppressors. If God values justice over victimization, then God desires that all oppressed people should be liberated. According to James Cone, if God is not just, if God does not desire justice, then God needs to be done away with. Liberation from a false god who privileges rich whites, and the realization of an alternative and true God who desires the empowerment of the oppressed through self-definition, self-affirmation, and self-determination is the core of Liberation Theology. Whether it is a Liberation Theology founded by the poor populations of Latin American or by the oppressed population of Blacks or women that form the core of Black Liberation and Feminist Liberation theology, they are dangerous because they redefine God according to their culture.

You want to know of another very scary potential of a false teaching; the teaching of Jesus redefined through the eyes of an aging white American male.

I ask you every week to open your Bible. It is not just lip service with me. It is because any of us are susceptible to believing a lie. Words spoken on God's behalf must be tested, tested against scripture – God's Word. That is why I ask you to bring your Bible. So that you will become comfortable carrying it with you wherever you go and so that you will use it to test the things being said.

I say again - we live in a world of Lies and these lies kill. This is not to say that every culture and person isn't allowed a perspective – just the opposite. I believe that every culture has much to show us about God through their lives in Christ. But these perspectives cannot change the fact that Christianity is born with certain bedrock truths held in tandem with one another. And these truths are worth fighting for, they are worth dying for! You see every believer's job is to contend or fight for the faith.

Every believer's job: "Contend for your faith . . ."

The writers Paul, James, John Jude all say the same thing: be aware, wake up, and be sober and vigilant. The liar is at your door like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. These are the last days of scripture. The advent of Christ ushered in the "Last Days." So these days must be 'more last' than ever. These are the days Jesus spoke of when he said that because of lawlessness – because of lies and deceit - the love of most will grow cold but those who endure to the end - those who contend for the faith faithfully – will be saved.

Just because the brilliant Commander in Chief promises victory on the beaches doesn't mean the troops can throw their weapons overboard. The promise of victory assumes valor in battle. When God promises that his church will be kept from defeat, his purpose is not that we lay down our sword and go to lunch, but that we pick up the sword of the Spirit and look confidently to God for the strength to fight and win.

This is a special day. This is Palm Sunday. Jesus will soon be standing looking at the city, anticipating the cross and I wonder. I wonder if he is saying to himself, is this worth it? Is this dusty city and these fickle humans worth all this pain and suffering and sacrifice. Perhaps He said to Himself, "No they aren't worth it. In and of themselves, they have done nothing to deserve my love. They have not listened to my truths." And then he turned and looked out to the desert and said "But Father we love them. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one, Father, can come to them but by me, and if I do not die they will not have a way. That is the truth so I will endure to the end that they may be saved."

The God who keeps

Jude's letter begins and ends with very comforting words to Christians. In verse 1 it describes us as "those who are *called, loved* in God the Father and *kept* for Jesus Christ." All three verbs are passive. They stress the action of God. God calls, God loves, and God keeps. We *are* called, *are* loved, and *are* kept. Jude is very eager to begin by stressing the security of the believer in God's sustaining love.

Then at the end of his letter in verse 24 he says, "Now to him who is *able to keep* you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God . . . be glory." Notice, in verse 1 we are *kept by God* for Jesus Christ. And in verse 24 God is able to *keep* us from falling. Jude begins and ends the letter by assuring believers that God exerts his omnipotence to keep them from falling away from the faith into a lie. Kept from being deceived by lies and false teachers, because we are abiding in the Word and the Word and Spirit of God abides in us.

If I am vigilant, I know that he will keep me from falling. He will work in me that which is "pleasing in his sight and present me with rejoicing before the throne of his glory." (Hebrews 13:21). This is the Palm Sunday promise.

Jesus was willing to die for the Truth. For Love's sake He died.

So I am wondering, what would you die for? Will you die for truth and love too? For he who does not deny himself and pick up his cross daily is not fit to follow Jesus.

Prayer